# Matt's Notes

## October 18th 2026

Preparing the notes and media for this episode on User Experience (UX) led me down more rabbit holes than usual.

For one, I found that for some reason the WordPress theme on our site became fickle about the featured image, which is the graphic associated with a post that people see when they visit the website. Part of the design process I follow involves using GIFs for this aspect of the notes; i.e., short moving images or video clips. I find these help draw attention to the site and add a certain narrative element to the posts which has become important to me. After trying several times, the site would render some GIF's as featured images, but not others.

As a result, I spent the better part of an afternoon trying various workarounds, which included trying

upwards of a dozen themes (the overall appearance and functionality of the site) before finding one which presented the desired images in the desired ways.

I've mentioned in previous notes about how I've used ChatGPT to generate images for an older writing project I've picked up again after six or seven years— to that end, I've subscribed to the platform to increase the number of images I'm able to generate. I've also found it helpful for creating higher-definition or "enhanced" versions of images which Doug has shared in the Google documents so that they render more clearly and with greater sharpness for the WordPress posts.

In the course of doing so, I followed an "in-chat

advertisement” to Shutterstock’s AI generator, which can create photo-realistic pictures and videos based on textual prompts. The results were both awesome and concerning. Awesome in that I was able to create a 4 or 8 second video of a graffiti-covered subway train pulling into a station astonishingly easily. Gone are the glitchy and haphazard renderings from three or four years ago when Doug and I did early episodes on AI and education.

I also created videos of a house falling into the ocean in North Carolina. The more specific the prompts, the more realistic the outputs.

Concerning, because this forty-dollar per month entry-level offering is only the tip of the iceberg. Hollywood should be concerned.

So should anyone with a photograph of themselves anywhere online. There are, for sure, applications which can take existing images and render them into graphic violence and/or pornography and/or other nefarious, scandalizing and outright wrong purposes. While the basic consumer applications supposedly have safeguards to prevent this kind of misuse, anyone with the necessary money and time to kill could create anything their higher imaginations- or reptile sex-and-violence seeking brains— could possibly imagine.

The addictive potential is high, as is the potential for “visual exploitation”.

But, to focus on the positive, somehow, I found myself slightly better about the potential of  generating photo-realistic images of, say, houses collapsing into the sea compared as compared to using clips of

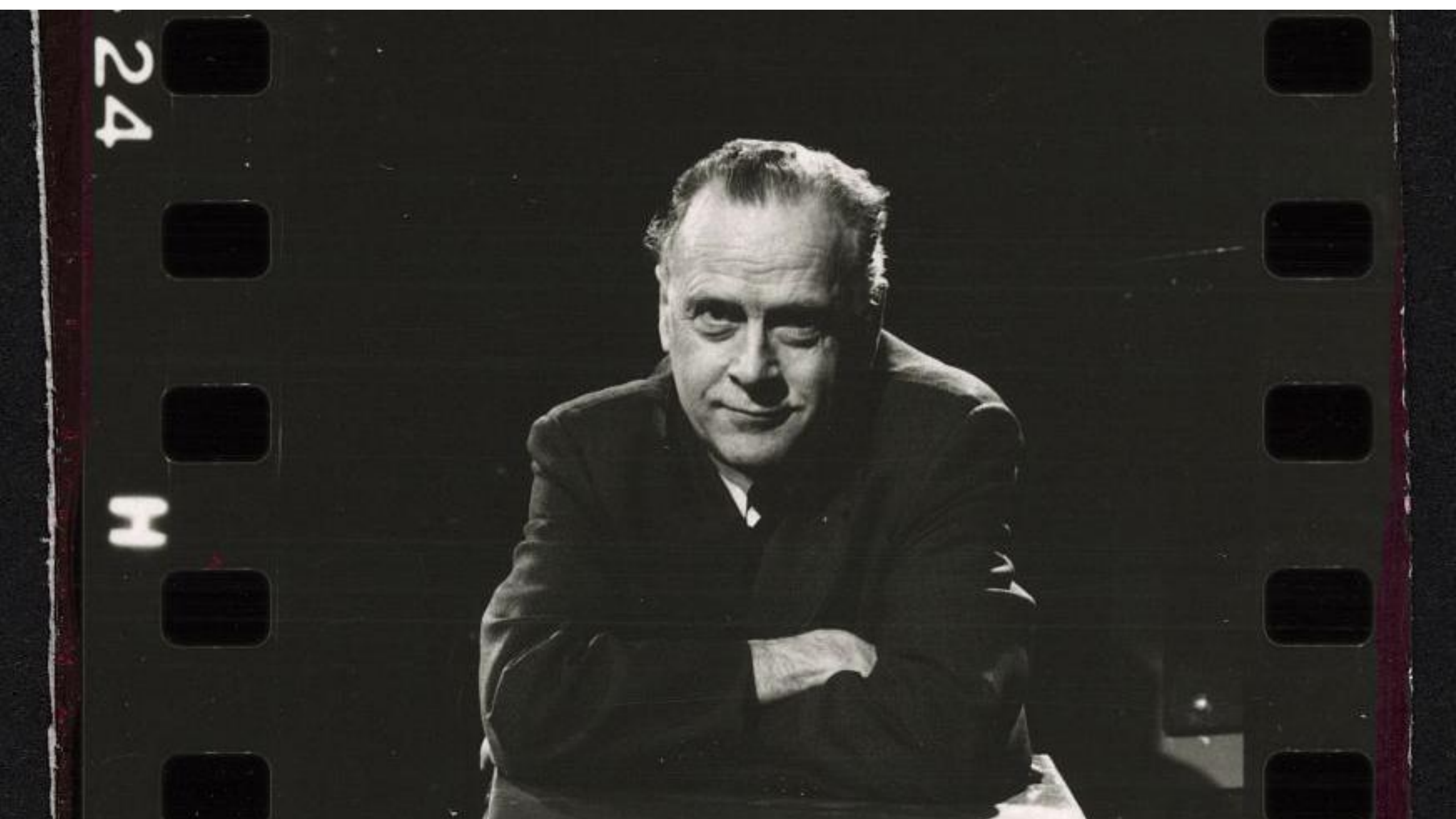
of, presumably, actual people's homes which were available through a traditional Google search.

The technical questions are relatively easy. The moral questions are staggeringly complex. Nevertheless, on the balance, I can see using ChatGPT and Shutterstock to create customized media to go with the podcast, as well as in other areas. The context and the purpose to which these applications are used have much to do with whether they are harmful or beneficial. I think.

You wonder what Marshall McLuhan might say.

But, in the absence of knowing, we have Google's AI summary of exactly that.

What a time to be alive.


24
H

Google

marshall mcluhan and ai

AI Mode | All | Images | Videos | Shopping | News | Forums | More | Tools

AI Overview

Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan's concepts—coined decades before the rise of modern generative tools—offer a foundational framework for understanding how artificial intelligence changes human thought, culture, and society. Instagram · Artificial Int... +2




## Core McLuhan Concepts Applied to AI

- **"The Medium is the Message":** McLuhan argued that the real impact of any technology is not the information it carries, but the structural change it introduces in human perception and behavior. In the context of AI, the message is not just what the chatbot or model outputs, but how it shifts research, writing, decision-making, and memory. LinkedIn +4

## Key McLuhan Concepts Applied to AI

- **"The Medium is the Message":** McLuhan argued that the real impact of any technology is the change in human scale, pace, and pattern it introduces—long before content is even considered. In the context of AI, the interface and processing mechanics shape how we think and make decisions far more than the specific text or images generated. LinkedIn +2
- **AI as the New "Ground" (Environment):** Just as a fish is unaware of water, humans risk becoming immersed in AI as an all-encompassing cognitive environment rather than viewing it as a separate tool. AI shifts from a distinct "figure" to the background "ground" of daily intellectual life. Cornell University Press +1
- **Extensions of Man:** McLuhan viewed technologies as extensions of human faculties. AI acts as a **cognitive prosthesis** or extension of human pattern recognition and synthesis, which can enhance output while risking the atrophy of deep, unassisted human critical thinking. LinkedIn · Raymond Uz... +1

- **The "Narcissus" Narcosis / Servomechanism Warning:** McLuhan warned that humans can become numb "servomechanisms" to their own extensions—mistaking the technology's reflection of human data for independent or superior truth. LinkedIn
- **Anticipated Personalization:** In a 1966 interview, McLuhan predicted a future where individuals could state their needs and receive customized, real-time information packages—a direct parallel to modern conversational AI and large language models like ChatGPT. Instagram · Artificial Inte... +1

## How Scholars Suggest Navigating AI Through a McLuhan Lens

- **Shift from Replacement to Partnership:** Treat AI as a collaborator for routine synthesis and pattern detection, while reserving ethical judgment, empathy, and strategic vision for humans. The Conversation +1
- **Cultivate Discernment:** Recognize what each technological extension amplifies and what it diminishes, actively preserving interdisciplinary and liberal arts education to maintain intellectual agency. Toronto Star +1

Would you like to explore how McLuhan's concept of **"hot and cool" media** applies to interacting with AI chatbots versus traditional search engines?



Ask anything






A BRIGHTER
TOMORROW
TOGETHER
FIRST
NATIONAL
BANK
FDIC




Safe
Savings
Stronger
Tomorrow
RIVERDALE
NATIONAL BANK
Your Trust
Our Priority
$


FIRST CITY BANK
FIRST CITY BANK
FDIC